

Sleepless in Hawkins by theamiableanachronism

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Summary: When El calls into a radio show about her lonely adoptive father, she receives thousands of letters, but only one, from way out in Hawkins, Indiana, sparks her interest.

Sleepless in Hawkins

Jim was late for work.

Again.

The crashing sounds throughout the trailer would have been evidence enough if she hadn't already been awake to hear him bellow "SHIT" to his silent alarm clock at 9:00 A.M. (he had to be at work at 8:00 A.M.).

But El wasn't paying attention to Jim's schedule that morning. The mailman had brought a new batch of letters, including one on pale blue paper that she'd already read three times, her fingers leaving tiny indents in the paper.

This was the one.

She could feel it.

This was the reason she'd called the radio show last week. This was the person she was hoping would have been listening when she managed to get Jim on the phone to show the world just how much he needed a wife. They'd already gotten hundreds, probably thousands, of letters, from all kinds of people looking for someone like Jim. But none of them were right. She'd gotten to the point where she could read just one sentence and know the person was completely wrong for her adoptive father. But with this one, she'd only gotten halfway through a sentence scrawled lovingly, nervously, across the top of the page before she knew that this person was completely right.

Down the hallway, Jim burst out of his bedroom, pinning his badge onto his uniform with one hand and trying to put on his belt and holster with the other. He winced and dropped his badge, jamming his finger into his mouth with a curse, the sign he'd impaled himself with his badge pin.

"Jim. Look at this letter."

Jim shuddered theatrically and placed a hurried kiss on top of El's curls. "I'm late. Later, okay?"

El clambered off the couch. "No wait, Jim. This is a good one. Her name is Joyce. Joyce Byers." She looked down at the letter again, smiling at the way saying the woman's name out loud felt. Warm and inviting. Just like her letter.

She looked back up at Jim, who had successfully pinned his badge on his chest above his front pocket and was looking into the mirror next to the front door at his haggard face. He winced, murmuring a "Jesus" under his breath. She held out the letter.

"Jim, read this."

He looked down into her eyes then up at the ceiling before sighing and taking the letter. She watched, heart pounding, as his eyes scanned the page.

"'Dear Sleepless and Daughter, I have never written a letter like this before' blah blah blah...been an excellent third baseman for as long as I or anyone else can remember and while we're on the subject let's just say right now Brooks Robinson was the best third baseman ever.'" Jim nodded, impressed. "'It's important that you agree with me on that, because even though I live in Hawkins, my mother was from Baltimore so you could say loving Brooks Robinson is in my blood.'"

"See?" El said, her cheeks sore from smiling so widely.

"See what?"

"You've always thought Robinson was the best."

Jim scoffed. "Everyone thinks Brooks Robinson's the best."

"But you do, and she does too." El huffed, annoyed he wasn't seeing what was so very obvious. "It's a sign."

Jim narrowed his eyes, staring at her for what felt like an eternity, before lifting his chin towards the bookshelf. "Where's your atlas? Get your atlas." He nudged her toward the bookshelf that almost reached the ceiling. "Look up the United States." El pulled out the atlas that

had long ago stopped hurting her arms to lift and dropped it with a thud on top of some cringeworthy letters. She flipped through the pages until she found the multicolored illustration of the United States. By this point, Jim had rounded the coffee table and was looking at it with her.

"Okay, I'll show you a sign," he said, his voice coming from just over her shoulder. "Where's Chicago?"

El took only a second to point to their hometown.

"Good," Jim said. "Now, where's Hawkins?"

This one took El a little longer, but just as she spotted the tiny letters in the middle of Indiana, Jim jabbed it with a finger and shouted triumphantly, "Indiana! A whole state away. Now that's—" He tapped the tip of her nose. "—a sign." He stood back up and headed for the door, giving her a final pat on the shoulder. "I'm out of here."

El frowned at his back. "One state isn't far."

Jim stopped, one hand on the doorknob, and dragged his other hand down his face. "El. We've been over this. I am not going to take time off work to board a plane just to meet some strange woman who for all we know could be some crazy lunatic."

"She's not crazy."

"Yeah? And how do you know that?"

El glared at him before shrugging. "She's not."

Jim sighed. "Look, I'm late. Can we talk about this later?"

El set her jaw. She walked to the kitchen table and for a second, he looked relieved. But then she swept up Joyce's letter and stomped out of the living room and down the hallway to her bedroom, slamming the door for the full effect.

She couldn't see him, but she knew Jim was probably hanging his head with his hand over his eyes. She heard the front door open and his voice carry down the hall.

"I'll see you at 5! Don't forget your homework! Love you!"

He slammed the door, the impact shaking the entire trailer.

El didn't even bother to watch his truck pull onto the road like she always did when he left for work. She was too angry.

Why wouldn't he give her a try? Didn't he want to be happy?

Joyce was perfect for him, she just knew it.

El would just have to try harder to get him to see that.

All three of them would be in Hawkins together.

If it was the last thing she did.